

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CPR-01 PM-05 NSC-05 USIA-06 OPR-02  
PA-01 PRS-01 SS-15 SY-05 A-01 USSS-00 CIAE-00  
INR-07 NSAE-00 /060 W  
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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1347

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 18439

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: OVIP (MAHMUD, ABDUL HALIM) EG  
SUBJ: VISIT SHEIKH OF AL-AZHAR TO U.S.

REF (A) CAIRO 18037 AND (B) CAIRO 17485

1. AT RECENT SOCIAL EVENT POLCOUNS HAD OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS RAMIFICATIONS OF VISIT OF SHEIKH OF AL-AZHAR, DR. A BDUL HALIM MAHMUD, TO U.S. WITH DR. GRAISS, A PROMINENT COPTIC PSYCHIATRIST. DR. GRAISS SAID THAT HE IS ADVISOR TO POPE SHENUDA ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STATE OF THE MUSLIM AND COPTIC COMMUNITIES, PARTICULARLY EXTREMIST GROUPS IN BOTH. HE HAD, FOR EXAMPLE, RECENTLY ATTENDED A COURT CASE INVOLVING AN 18 YEAR OLD COPTIC STUDENT WHO HAD BEEN ARRESTED DISTRIBUTING TRACTS OUTLINING STRATEGY FOR COPTIC COUNTERATTACKS AGAINST MUSLIMS FOR THE BURNING OF CHURCHES (PRESUMABLY SAME INDIVIDUAL REFERRED TO IN REF (B)). THE COURT HAD TREATED THE CASE AS A STRICTLY POLITICAL MATTER RATHER THAN A RELIGIOUS ONE IN ORDER TO AVOID STIRRING UP RELIGIOUS FEELING. GRAISS CITED THIS CASE AS AN EXAMPLE OF COPTIC EXTREMISM WHICH HE MAINTAINED WAS A REACTION TO ACTIVITIES OF MUSLIM FANATICS. HE NOTED IN PASSING THAT DURING THE TRIAL THE DEFENDANT HAD CLAIMED HE WAS SUPPORTED BY AMERICAN COPITC SOCIETY. (HOWEVER, NO EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THIS CLAIM WAS PRESENTED IN COURT.)

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2. REGARDLESS OF TRUTH OF DEFENDANT'S CLAIM, GRAISS SAID, POPE SHENUDA'S VISIT TO THE U.S. AND HIS RECEPTION BY PRESIDENT CARTER WAS PERCEIVED BY COPTS AND MUSLIMS ALIKE, PARTICULARLY YOUNG EXTREMISTS, AS DEMONSTRATION OF USG SUPPORT FOR COPTS. VISIT OF SHEIKH OF AL-AZHAR IS NOW SEEN BY THESE GROUPS AS USG ATTEMPT TO BALANCE OFF THE VISIT OF SHENUDA. WHILE GRAISS (WHO LIVED IN U.S. FOR FIVE YEARS) UNDERSTOOD THAT USG WAS NOT

ORCHESTRATING THESE VISITS, HE STRESSED THAT THIS IS THE WAY THEY ARE PERCEIVED BY BOTH COMMUNITIES HERE. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT IF DR. MAHMUD WAS NOT RECEIVED BY PRESIDENT CARTER, IT WOULD BE A "CALAMITY" BECAUSE U.S. WOULD BE SEEN AS FAVORING CHRISTIANS WHICH COULD CAUSE REACTION AGAINST COPTS.

3. COMMENT: IT IS OF SOME SIGNIFICANCE THAT LEADING COPTS APPARENTLY FAVOR PRESIDENT'S RECEPTION OF DR. MAHMUD IN THEIR OWN INTERESTS. EMBASSY HAS PURPOSELY NOT SOUGHT OUT MORE AUTHORITATIVE COPTIC VIEWS OF SHEIKH OF AL-AZHAR'S VISIT FOR OBVIOUS REASONS. WE ARE, HOWEVER, IN FULL AGREEMENT WITH DR. GRAISS'S ASSESSMENT THAT PRESIDENT'S NOT RECEIVING DR. MAHMUD COULD HAVE ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES.  
ELTS

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**Review Markings:**  
Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
22 May 2009  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009